

5. Handling Opposition Pharaoh's Way or Handling Opposition Christ's Way

In the book of Exodus, we read that God sent Moses to Egypt to lead the nation of Israel out of their bondage to Pharaoh. Moses was told to lead Israel to the land that God had promised more than four hundred years earlier to Abraham. However, for many years, the people had been slaves in the land of Egypt. Pharaoh had no intention of allowing the people to leave Egypt. As a result, Moses and Aaron faced immediate conflict when they went to talk to Pharaoh.

Exodus 5:1-2 says, "Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness."' And Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.'" Exodus 5:6-9 tells how Pharaoh handled opposition, "So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, 'You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it. For they are idle; therefore they cry out, saying, "Let us go and sacrifice to our God." Let more work be laid on the men, that they may labor in it, and let them not regard false words.'" We see that Pharaoh handled opposition by making those who opposed suffer.

We see six things about Pharaoh in these verses. First, Pharaoh said, in Exodus 5:1, "I do not know the Lord." Any person who does not know the Lord will follow the world's form of leadership. Such a person does not have the desires Christ gives to those who follow Him. In fact, a person who does not know the Lord is controlled by his or her own sinful desires. However, many people who become Christians, and even become leaders, continue to act based on their own desires, instead of seeking the will of Christ.

Second, Pharaoh said he would not obey the Lord. In Exodus 5:1, Pharaoh said, "'Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?'" This verse shows us that Pharaoh had no intention to obey the Lord. In fact, his statement was a direct refusal. When people reject God, they will also refuse to obey God, even when they hear a direct command from God. This even happens after people become Christians. They may know what the Word of God says, but refuse to obey the Word. This puts a person in a difficult situation. It is impossible to enjoy the blessing and peace of the Lord when we refuse to do what He commands us to do.

Third, Pharaoh rejected the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Exodus 5:4-5 says, "Then the king of Egypt said to them, 'Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor.' And Pharaoh said, 'Look, the people of the land are many now, and you make them rest from their labor!'" Without even investigating, Pharaoh immediately concluded that the people were taking a rest from their work. Here, we see that Pharaoh was unwilling to even listen to Moses, because he felt that Moses was opposing him and leading the people to oppose him. Pharaoh did not like any opposition to his desires and plans.

Fourth, Pharaoh immediately began to get even. Exodus 5:6-8 says, "So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, 'You shall no longer give the

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people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it. For they are idle; therefore they cry out, saying, “Let us go and sacrifice to our God.””” Here, we see that Pharaoh handled opposition by making those who opposed him suffer for it. Many people are like Pharaoh and want to get even by making others suffer when someone opposes them.

Fifth, Pharaoh punished the people by making them work harder. Verses 7-19 show that Pharaoh refused to provide any straw for the bricks he was forcing the people to make. Instead, he made the people scatter throughout the land to find straw for their bricks. At the same time, he continued to require them to make the same number of bricks. The leaders of Israel were beaten when the people were not able to make as many bricks as they had been making.

Sixth, Pharaoh caused the people to give up any hope of better conditions. Exodus 5:20-21 says, “Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them. And they said to them, ‘Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.’” The leaders of Israel thought they were going to be killed by Pharaoh because Moses had tried to set them free from Pharaoh. They spoke like people who had no hope for the future.

In contrast, Christ both taught, and showed by His own example, that, as Christians, we are to handle opposition in a very different way. Matthew 5:44-45 says, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Christ taught us that we do not need to handle opposition like the world handles it. In fact, we are to do just the opposite of the world.

First, Christ said we are to love our enemies. Romans 12:21 says, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” When a Christian is overcome by evil, that Christian will handle opposition in a very similar way to the way that Pharaoh handled opposition. Christ said that we are to do just the opposite. We are to overcome evil by doing good. As we love our enemies, Christ will work in their hearts and lives. Even if they harden their hearts, Christ will use the love we show toward them to cause others to realize the great change Christ can make in the lives of those who seek to obey and please Him. That love may draw others to Christ.

Second, Christ said we are to bless those who curse us. 1 Peter 3:9 says, “Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.” As followers of Christ, we are not to follow the example of the world. Even when others speak evil of us, Christ can give us His power to give a blessing instead, as we yield to Him. That is what Christ calls us to do, because He has promised that we will inherit a blessing.

Third, Christ said that we are to do good to our enemy. Here, we see that words will be followed by actions if we choose to develop the attitudes of Christ in our lives. Instead of looking for ways

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to get even with those who oppose us, we will look for ways to show kindness to those who oppose us. Jesus showed this kind of kindness to Judas when Judas came to betray Him. Matthew 26:50 says, “But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” At the very moment that Judas was betraying Him, Jesus treated Judas as a friend.

Fourth, Christ said that we are to pray for those that persecute us. Regardless of what people might do to us, Christ said that He will give us the strength to respond to that opposition by praying for those who oppose us. Stephen showed us that Christ will give us His strength to pray for those who persecute us, if we ask Him for that strength. Acts 7:60 says, “Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” The prayer of Stephen was something Paul never forgot because it helped to change his life. In Acts 22:20, as Paul gave his testimony to the Jews, he said, “And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.”

Fifth, Christ said that the Father also loves even those who are unjust. Matthew 5:45 says, “That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” As we learn to show the attitudes of Christ in our lives, we show that we are the sons of our Father in heaven. We will only show these attitudes as we learn to yield our lives to Christ, instead of acting in our own strength.

Sixth, Christ showed us how to do these things by His own example. In Luke 23:34, Christ prayed, “‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’ And they divided His garments and cast lots.” By His example, Christ showed us that it is possible to forgive in any situation. The key is that we have to learn to ask Christ to give us His strength to forgive, instead of trying to forgive in our own strength.

Do you handle opposition like Pharaoh, or are you learning to handle opposition like Christ? If we are learning to handle opposition like Christ, by asking Him to give us His power as we yield to Him, we will see our own lives transformed. In addition, we will also see the Lord use our example to help transform the lives of others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to have the attitudes of Christ, and help them learn to handle opposition by following the example of Christ.